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PREACHED IN

The First Church, Dorchester,

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 1844.

BY NATHANIEL HALL.

BOSTON:

S. N. DICKINSON & CO. PRINTERS.

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THIS Sermon, prepared and preached in the ordinary course of ministerial duty, is now printed at the repeated request of the children of the venerated individual whom chiefly it commemorates — for their use and that of their friends.

S E R M O N .

THE LORD GAVE, AND THE LORD HATH TAKEN AWAY; BLESSED BE THE
NAME OF THE LORD. — *Job* 1: 21.

THAT ascriptions of praise should break from the mourner's lips — that strains of grateful benediction should alternate with the wail of bereavement, might to some seem strange, inconsistent, impossible. There is a time — is the common thought — for all things; a time to rejoice, and a time to mourn. But how can these times be one? how can these differing elements mingle? With what propriety are we called upon to bless God, when, stricken down at our side, and irrecoverably taken, are our cherished comforts? We may command ourselves to a silent submission; we may bow, uncomplainingly, to the fatal mandate; but how can we rejoice? How can the current of our thoughts, at such a time, be made to move the wheels of gratitude?

Such, it seems, were not the views and feelings of him whom Scripture has presented us in the

most ancient of its books. As messenger after messenger came in, to tell him that the dearest objects of his desire on earth had fallen before the blast of the destroyer;—‘The Lord gave’—is his devout response—‘and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.’

The sentiment is worthy of a Christian heart, though uttered in the morning twilight of the day of Truth. And yet, to how many of us, born and living within that day, is it a stranger! How many take exception—as has been expressed—to the spirit of the text, and repel the idea of blessing God in the midst of privation. How prone are we to make our seasons of bereavement occasions for the indulgence of an all-absorbing sorrow and depression. How almost nothing of any other aspect do they wear, than that of grief. That there *are* other feelings, with many, I do not doubt; that hope, and gratitude, and cheerful submission, are glowing beneath that exterior of woe, unquenched by its showering tears. But, in justice to those filial hearts, in justice to our Christian faith, I would it might more outwardly appear. I would that the occasions on which we meet to join in prayer around the vacant form of a departed friend, ere we consign it to its dusty bed, might be more visibly enstamped with the impress of our divine religion; might be more in harmony with its lofty hopes, and heaven-breathed assurances; that, ‘Blessed

be the name of the Lord,' might overarch that scene of sadness, expressive of the sentiment, which, at such, as at all times, should surmount and sanctify the heart's experience. The only feelings to which, on these occasions, we give outward expression, is that of melancholy and dejection. We clothe ourselves in darkest raiment. We cover the sleeper with a sable pall. We make all tones inadmissible, that are not in accord with the plaintiveness of grief.

And well it is that the heart's burthening sadness *should* have there its emblem-language. Death is solemn, and the grave is dark — and fitting is it that mortal man should feel, in their presence, his littleness and frailty. But has not the Christian a faith which triumphs over death and the grave? a hope which dispels their darkness? May he not see in one the appointment of a Father, and in the other the passage-way to a brighter home? And why should not this faith and hope have, also, their manifest expression? — It is meet that they should have. And as I have stood beside the mortal remains of some risen spirit, whom sickness and trial had purified and perfected, I have felt almost constrained to utter: Let your tears flow on, ye weeping relatives; it is the sacred tribute of your loving hearts. But O, look backward upon the life that has now closed, and upward where faith is pointing you, and say: Is it *only* tears — the tears of *sorrow*, that the

occasion demands of you? Throw the flower-wreath on that coffined dust! emblem of the fragrant virtues which had here their blossoming, and have gone to unfold, with augmented beauty and a deathless life, in a holier clime. Breathe the anthem of gratitude through that darkened chamber! for there the struggle has been met and passed; another soul has worthily endured, and hopefully departed.

Let us now look more particularly at some of those considerations which may make the sentiment of the text appear more reasonable to us. Do you ask why you should bless God in your bereavement—you who have been called to surrender beloved and virtuous relatives? I answer, Bless him for what they were to you. Is it nothing, that for so long a time they have been with you? that you have enjoyed, so many years, their society and affection? Reckon up the manifestations to you, of their fond attachment. Compute the value of their sympathy and services. Measure the amount of holy influence they have exerted upon your characters; the quickening light they have shed upon your understandings; the genial warmth they have infused into your affections.—Were they children? Go back to their dawning life, and bring to mind the daily pleasures and satisfactions you derived from witnessing the artless exercise of their unfolding powers; from receiving the thrilling tokens of

their unbought affection; from being the highest object of their confidence and regard. Recall the time when God first gave them to your waiting arms, and the fathomless fountain of a parent's love leaped joyously at their unconscious bidding; when, by their angel-purity, they moved the heart to holier longings, and imparted heavenward impulse; the time when your life's joy was in their presence; when they were the light of your habitation, the bloom of your pathway. Follow them through the succeeding period of their lives. Think of all they have been to you: how the hopes and prayers in their behalf, which went forward and upward from around their cradle, have been fulfilled and answered,—not, it may be, precisely to your wish, but yet graciously, sweetly answered. Think of the joy that has filled your hearts, as, from time to time, you have had knowlege of their increasing virtues—of their established principles; as you have seen them go forward in life, doing honor at once to themselves and you; bearing an unsullied name, winning the confidence and regard of all who knew them.

Or, were they parents, who have been taken? Let your thoughts go back on the track of your existence, to your *own* dawning life; and where memory cannot go, let the sight of others' infancy mirror to you your own; and think what they must have been to you then, who are now no

more ; of the untiring affection that bore you in its arms, that watched above your slumbers, that met, at each moment, your unspoken want ; of those faithful hands, now wasting into dust, which guided and blessed you through the years of childhood and of youth, which toiled to make your homes pleasant, and your lives happy. Think of all they have been to you as protectors, as guardians, as counsellors, as guides ; of their lessons of wise experience, of their examples of gentle virtue. Summon them all before you, — this cloud of witnesses to their fidelity, their sympathy, their disinterested and unchanging love ; the instances of all the enjoyment, and all the benefit, — physical, intellectual, moral, — which they have been the agents and instruments in procuring you ; of all you owe them for what you are in person, in condition, in character ; of all the hallowing influences that have fallen upon your hearts, from the society of their advanced life, from endeavors to minister to their growing infirmities, and to smooth their descending path.

Or, was it other of the endeared relations of life that they sustained to you, whom you mourn as taken ? I need not specify the points to which your attention should be directed, in order that you may know how greatly they have blessed you. Memory is recounting to you, — O, too vividly and minutely, now, in the freshness of

your bereavement, — the touching instances, thronging the whole path of your intercourse, of their kindness, and faithfulness, and fond attachment. By your own bursting grief at their departure; by those scalding tears that fell with the last gaze upon their death-changed countenance, is revealed the greatness of your loss, your sense of what they were to you. ‘The Lord gave.’ And is the gift to be no longer remembered in gratitude, because it was, and is not? In the memory of the days and years in which it was spared to you, will you not bless God, even in your bereavement?

‘The Lord hath *taken.*’ And in *that* fact is a reason presented for your gratitude. *He* hath taken them. Into the hands of no enemy, of no stranger, of none unwilling or unable to protect and bless them, have they fallen. But into his hands who fashioned their frame, who inspired their spirit, who ordained the circumstances of their earthly lot, and bestowed upon them its abounding good. In the view of his omniscience, the time had come when it was best for them they should go; when the discipline of earth had wrought upon them its work of blessing, and fitted them for the enjoyments of a holier sphere. They have ascended there; to a nobler mansion in that Father’s house, whom here they loved to serve; to a region where the storms of time rage not, and no saddening changes come. It was

best for *them* that they should go, and best also for those who survive them. If we knew the good that God designs in our bereavements, we should need no call to bless him in them. Great is the trial; but great also may be the gain,—a gain to our hearts—to our religious faith, and hopes, and character. It may call our attention from what was engrossing us to our hurt. It may enliven the sensibilities which, by contact with the world, were becoming hardened. It may dissolve the fetters of indifference and unbelief, which were beginning to press, with deadening weight, upon the soul. It may open the fountains of our inner being, and let the fertilizing streams gush forth over the heart's neglected garden. It may remind us, as nothing else would, of our mortality, and our immortality; may lead up our thoughts and aspirations to that world, where our dearest earthly treasures are removed, and quicken us to a diligent preparation for our own admission there. Softened and elevated by its griefs, the heart yields itself to its diviner tendencies. Made conscious of its wants, it yearns for what is better than its former dependence. Life, beneath its cloud of sorrow, wears a different aspect. Its great purposes, before but dimly apprehended, stand out in clearness. Truths to which the ear has been long familiar, are invested with a new meaning and power.—And who does not know what an influence is exerted by the

departed, whose memory affection has enshrined! What power is there in the thought of them, to elevate and bless! How does all that was good in them, become more exalted in our esteem; and each word of counsel, and each deed of love, bear with a deeper force upon the soul. 'Being dead, they yet speak,' and never with such effect. Being absent, they are yet with us, in our daily memories, and by their influence upon our lives.

There are those among you, who, since last we met here, have been visited with heavy bereavement. With the thoughts which it has been given me now to utter, they will receive the sympathy that prompted and accompanies them. Seldom, at any one time, has there been with us so large a company of mourners as to-day. Seldom has death, within so short a space, taken from us so many, fondly and long to be remembered.

Shall I speak of them? Of her,* the affectionate and devoted daughter, sister, friend,—gentle, confiding, faithful,—taken, just as she had reached the verge of womanhood,—by lingering consumption, led downward to the tomb; while many and strong were the ties which held her here; while life was all bright and beautiful, and the voices of invitation came sweetly and

* Miss MARY ANN CAPEN.

winningly from its opening paths. Led downward to the tomb, shall we say? by that fell destroyer. Say, rather, led upward, to scenes fairer than her fancy had ever pictured; to a happiness richer than she had ever yearned for; to a society with which her spirit was in harmony, and a world for which her dutiful and loving life had been a preparation.

And him,* the son, husband, brother; and all in these sacred relations that make them dear and precious; called, in the midst of life, to turn forever away from the pleasant home which he had toiled to build, and the wide circle of kindred by whom he was esteemed and cherished, and the sweetly-pleading faces of childhood and infancy, looking to him for support and guidance; the victim, for many long months, of a wearing and painful disease; and yet bearing all,— the disappointment, the pain, the weariness,— with a patience and submission, a cheerful, yet humble trust, which made his apartment a scene of holy triumph, where it was a privilege to be; looking at death, in its gradual but sure approaches, with a peacefulness and serenity which nothing but Christian faith could have inspired; and yielding himself, at length, to its mysterious agency, in the undoubting assurance that it would lead him to a fairer and happier home.

* MR. LEMUEL DEXTER CLAPP.

And yet another: * her, whose lifeless form we followed yesterday to its lowly bed; for many years the oldest inhabitant of our town, — having lived a century of years, save only four. Beautiful, as I was permitted to witness it, was her life; and beautiful her death. With senses unenfeebled; with mental faculties unobscured; with sensibilities tender, and strong, and active; with nothing of age but its teeming memories, and large experience, and purified affections, and ripened virtues; surrounded by a host of kindred, even to the fourth generation, emulating each other in the manifestation towards her of fondness and respect; with a heart of simple goodness, that, so far as man could read it, knew naught of guile, of selfishness, of enmity, — that had a throb of pity for every form of suffering, a smile of kindness for every passer-by, a plea of charity for every offender; with a step almost as firm and elastic, even to the last, as a youthful maiden's; with a countenance scarcely less attractive to the eye for its lingering beauty, than it was gladdening to the heart for its beamings of affection; enjoying life with almost the zest of childhood, and yet with the passionless serenity of age; — thus and so did she pass down the vale of years, treading onwards to its extremest limit, the living image of peaceful and happy old age; —

* MRS. JOHN HOWE.

and then, suddenly, without a pang, without a groan — with no perception of its enclosing shadows, passing through the vale of death, to the bright regions of immortal youth.

Happy exit! Happy for *her*; and although surviving affection would gladly have accompanied her, with its soothing services, down the dark descent, and exchanged with her the parting farewell, yet let it not mourn that it was not so; but rejoice, rather, that she was spared the need of those services, the pain of that farewell; rejoice, that so unconsciously to herself, the silver cord was loosed; that so gently that icy hand was laid upon her heart, and its long-issuing streams were in a moment stayed. Let them rejoice that she was spared to them so long; that her life was so happy, so tranquil, so full of blessing, so simply good; that so many hearts have been enriched by her affection, and more enriched by the exercise towards her of their own; that she has been at once the bestower and the object of so much tender and disinterested regard. Let them rejoice in the faith, that this world, so delightful to her, even with its shadows and changes — and she had known these as others do — is exchanged for a region far more delightful; for a companionship more loving.

And yet there is sadness, I know, to many who hear me — I confess to it myself — in the thought that she has *gone* — beyond our sight, beyond our

reach ; that we have beheld, for the last time, her venerable form ; have received, for the last time, her expressions of parental interest and regard ; that we shall see her no more in that, her accustomed seat, which but the last Sabbath she occupied — listening to the offered consolation, which, she little thought, the event of her own departure was so soon to make needful ; that we shall meet her no more at that ordinance of Commemoration, which, for more than fifty years, she has here observed.

Not soon, not ever, shall we forget her. She will live in our memory, the realized ideal of a beautiful old age. Yes, beautiful old age. We have seen it once, combining all its attractions, and with none of its repulsiveness. Beautiful old age ! Like some stately tree — the child of centuries — its leaves still fresh and verdant ; lifting themselves as gracefully to the passing breeze, and reflecting as lovingly the glancing sunbeams, as in its earlier years ; its branches rising into a purer atmosphere, and yet bending earthward with a sheltering sweep ; and around it, a forest which itself has planted, waving their homage, and renewing, in their own, its life. — Beautiful old age ! living in its affections ; attaching to itself all hearts ; inspiring the young with a reverence devoid of fear, and an affection unsullied by selfishness ; becoming more firmly fixed in the loving regard of increasing kindred, with every

advancing year. So have we seen it, in her who no more is with us. We bless the hand that has taken her, that she was given and so long continued. 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.'

Farewell, aged mother! Many are they who received from thee a mother's affection, and one, at least, not included within the circle of thy kindred. Farewell! We shall see thee no more on earth: May we meet thee in that brighter realm!



